[TCBC]
THE CYBERPUNK BOOK CLUB #001

What is the Matrix? Control.
-from **The Matrix** (1999)

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<Editorial>

Welcome to TCBC

<by **Ronin Vektor**>

What should you do when your country crosses the line? When you realize it's no longer *just* a cesspool of neoliberal muck we're forced to trudge through every day. That the sewage is rising and has slowly become a sea of authoritarian fuckery?

Ride your white privilege like it's public goddamn transportation, the devil poised on my left shoulder says. *Buy a MAGA hat. Shit, wear a pointy Klan hat if you have to. You don't actually have to join their cult—just look like you belong.*

Don't listen to that fucking idiot, says the devil reclining on my right shoulder. Not sure what happened to my angel. Probably got arrested and deported for protesting the genocide in Gaza. *Buy a shit ton of booze and drugs. Just let the rest of Trump's second term pass by in a fog of substance-induced delirium.*

Neither idea appeals to me. I've never been good at fitting in or going along with the crowd. Plus, I might be an asshole—but I'm not an *ignorant asshole.* Booze and drugs are expensive when you have bills to pay. And besides, I'm beginning to wonder if there will be elections either later this year or in 2027.

So I'm back to my original question—What the fuck should I do? I thought about this question for some time.

Ultimately, I decided it depended on a number of factors. What are you capable of doing? What resources do you have? How much time

can you spare away from sniffing out the cheese in the center of the maze? Are there any organizing efforts already happening nearby you can join? What consequences are you willing to face? All kinds of shit has to be considered.

Me—I can write. But, like most Americans, I scrape by from paycheck to paycheck. So I can't afford to miss much work unless I want to live out of my car. Any organizing efforts around me are either Democratic party publicity/fundraiser soapbox-speech rallies, or are so small I haven't found them. And I'm willing to face just about any consequence for making people aware of and commenting on the dystopia taking shape in the United States. So I took what PTO I had, picked up some pens and notebooks, slapped some PRESS patches onto a vest, and started an independent publication.

Am I marching through the streets? No. But at least I'm doing something—which is more than what most will be able to say when the last of what passed for democracy in the United States finally shits itself and dies.

I have three pieces for you this issue. In *The High-Tech Low-Life Bukkake,* I explain why I've named this project ***The Cyberpunk Book Club***. Then, in *The Matrix: A Philosophical Pipe Bomb,* I offer a review of a 26 year old film—hopefully in a way that makes you think of it in a new light. I wrap up with a horror story about a man haunted by what could have been in *Like the Devil He Is.*

Yes, I wrote this whole issue. I hope to bring some more voices to **TCBC** in the future. Until next issue.

-RV

<Essay>

The High-Tech Low-Life Bukkake

<by **Ronin Vektor**>

I love the cyberpunk genre. I salivate over books like *Neuromancer.* Movies like *The Matrix.* Games like *Cyberpunk 2077.* There's just something about neon-soaked cities, cybernetic limbs, and existential angst that gets my willy throbbing. No little blue pills for me. Just whisper *Wintermute* in my ear and I'm ready to go all night. But that's the thing—cyberpunk is supposed to be imaginary. Despite my love for the genre, I'm not thrilled to find

myself shoved headfirst into a technocratic cyberpunk bukkake.

No, we don't have neural net input jacks in the back of our heads. We're still waiting on the flying cars promised ever since Henry Ford, hero of American industry, was rooting for the Nazis. And sadly, we don't have colossal holograms of a naked Ana de Armas strolling through the streets. It's like the pioneers of advancement all stood around, slapping my face with their cocks, but withheld the finale.

But don't let the missing money shots fool you. Just because you watched the free version doesn't mean they didn't spray their rugged individualist free market spunk.

Here's some context for the uninitiated:

Back in the gloriously neon 1980s, a number of science fiction writers decided to stop regurgitating the genre's popular utopian daydreams. Corporate greed, neoliberal politics, and technology were changing the world around them. The evening news spouted stories of drug epidemics and gang violence sweeping the nation. MTV was corrupting America's youth and satanic cults were running its daycare centers. These authors were watching the future take shape, and it wasn't Gene Roddenberry's colonialist vision of boldly going where no man (except those who were already there) had gone before.

Instead, they imagine sprawling and overpopulated cities, cluttered with the refuse of progress. The general population, just trying to make ends meet, is preyed on by both wealthy elites and ruthless criminals. Technology advanced at an exponential rate but, for the average citizen, quality of life only declined. This high-tech, low-life genre became known as cyberpunk.

As for bukkake, that's when a group of guys stand around jerking their—just kidding. I know *you know* what a bukkake is.

Well, if I'm going to be in this show, I might as well put on a commanding performance. Now, do I want to be a rocker like Johnny Silverhand in *Cyberpunk 2077* or Priss in *Bubblegum Crisis?* I'm not attractive enough for that and no one wants me to violate their ears with my musical *talents.* How about a brilliant hacker like Hiro Protagonist in *Snow Crash* or Trinity in *The Matrix?* Nope, my computer skills would make a real hacker cringe at the thought of me even playing one in an internet doom porn video. But Spider Jerusalem—the Hunter S. Thompson-inspired journalist from Warren Ellis' *Transmetropolitan?* Yeah, I know how to be a loud-mouthed asshole who

wants people to understand the fucking truth.

Now I need a memorable stage name—much for the same reason porn stars don't use their real names. I'm not worried about some crazed fan showing up at my door, but fascist goon squads who also want to tie me up in a basement somewhere. But for different reasons and with different intentions. How about something like Ronin Vektor?

And finally, my scene. I could submit my work for publication by others. But I really don't feel like dealing with some corporate cock-sock telling me what I can and cannot say. Besides, publishing shit yourself is easy these days and literally any fucking whack-job can find a platform. Just ask Alex Jones. So, independent media it is.

I'm ready for my sticky aftermath closeup.

You're more than 600 words into this rant, so maybe I've lost some of your attention. Maybe you even feel a little dirty for reading this far. But tuning out and closing your eyes won't change that you're on your knees next to me, getting covered in the same mess.

Every few years we vote for politicians whose campaigns are bankrolled by large corporations and wealthy elites. Once elected, regardless of party, those politicians pass laws and enact policies—most of which are written by think tanks funded by those same big donors. Not surprisingly then, we have political and economic systems that work together like a machine, constantly producing wealth for those elites.

Meanwhile, the system reduces everyone else to different sized gears turning in that machine. Some are big, thick gears with sturdy teeth that barely feel the grinding movements of the machine. Most are smaller gears, being crushed under the weight of the larger cogwheels above them. No matter their size though, their sole purpose is to produce wealth for the system's architects.

Even full-time workers scrape by from paycheck to paycheck. Many work two or three jobs just to survive. No matter how much, or how hard they work to produce wealth for the elites though, they will never experience the slightest bit of financial security.

They come home feeling like they just got hatefucked—drained, dehumanized, demoralized. So they turn on the TV and zone out for hours at a time. They scroll through other people's lives on social media. They buy tons of new shit, guaranteed to make them or their lives happier. They numb themselves with alcohol and

drugs. Anything for a fleeting relief from the despair in the pits of their stomachs.

It is a system that drives people to seek escape from their own lives. Is it any wonder that mental health continues to decline and suicide continues to be a leading cause of death in the United States? And any escape you desire is readily accessible through a device, website, app, streaming service, or other marvel of the modern world—for a price that will make those elites even richer. If that's not the definition of high-tech and low-life, I don't know what is.

Then, every few years, we're offered a chance to "make a difference." Register. Vote. Elect the right politician and, eventually, everything will get better… right?

That's just the way the world is, some of you might be saying right now. Well, fuck you and your pseudo-philosophical self-fellatio. The state of the world is not some magical thing that *just is*—it's the emerging result of billions of choices made by me, you, and everyone else on a daily basis.

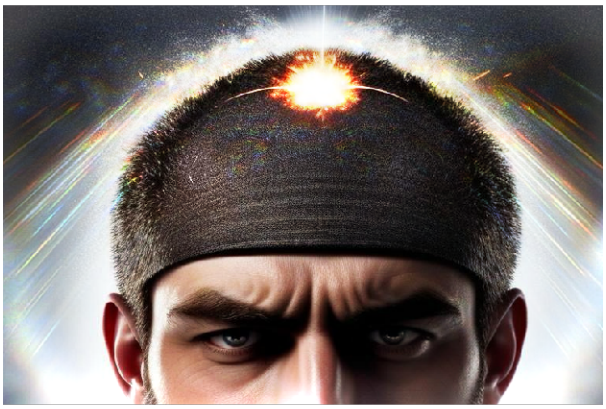
The reason we have those technocratic dicks waving in our faces is because they understand this fundamental truth. It's why they spend so much of their time and resources on marketing, PR, and advertising. They aren't *just* selling you products and services—they're selling you narratives, opinions, and worldviews. Because they understand these things heavily influence your choices. That at any point, we could choose to no longer kneel before them with eager mouths ready to serve them. And this fundamental truth is so frightening to them that they label even the most moderate regulation or socially beneficial program as radical left extremism.

I'm not warning you that technocratic authoritarianism is creeping into American politics. People have been warning about that ever since a group of wealthy men, today regarded as great Americans, plotted to overthrow the government when FDR was in office. As I write this, we have a president who is attacking what remains of the free press, strong-arming schools into teaching his party's ideology, ignoring court orders, disappearing legal residents who exercised their right to free speech, has made allusions to the days of so-called "radical left extremism" never coming back, and has talked about serving a third term despite constitutional term limits. Technocratic authoritarianism isn't creeping into American politics—it's our current fucking political model.

The stage is set—welcome to the high-tech, low-life bukkake. Like it or not, you're in this scene with me. I'm here to bring you my unique brand of sociopolitical commentary, philosophical thought, and some short/serialized fiction. I can't promise I'm going to brighten your day, but I hope I'm entertaining while I tell you how fucked everything is.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to try and drink this existential angst away.

-RV



<Review>

The Matrix: A Philosophical Pipe Bomb

<by **Ronin Vektor**>

Now and then, some jackass shatters our fragile understandings of reality. Galileo pisses off *The Church* by peeping on God with a telescope. Einstein gives the scientific community aneurysms by ejaculating $E=mc^2$ onto a chalkboard. Orson Welles incites panic about invading Martians when Americans turned on their radios too late. Albert Hofmann opens the door to new realities by cooking the world's first batch of LSD.

There you are one minute, minding your own business. The whole world makes sense. Then BAM—you're in the goddamn *Twilight Zone* and nothing is real anymore.

I first watched *The Matrix* on beautiful chromatic DVD. Oh, how that movie tantalized my hormone-fueled late teenage angst. The bullet-time and slick special effects. The fights and explosions. The trench coats and Carrie-Anne Moss' ass in black skintight PVC. It was like I died and went to that great Hot Topic in the sky.

Then I got older. Philosophical. I started thinking about the movie.

Now I can't watch the thing without some new wormhole opening in my mind. Great if you've got a whole night to question your own existence. Not so great if you're *just* trying to review the fucker.

Lana and Lilly Wachowski wrote *The Matrix* in 1994. Warner Bros. bought it along with the screenplays for *Assassins* and *Bound. Assassins*, a standard 90s action flick, was quickly produced and released in 1995. The siblings were allowed to direct *Bound*, a steamy lesbian

thriller, and that film was released in 1996. But the execs doubted audiences could make sense of *The Matrix's* complex plot and themes.

You see, I believe lots of corpos have a sort of eugenics-inspired understanding of the general public. Only, instead of cranial shape, they link intelligence to bank account balances. However, the project was eventually given a green light and pre-production began in 1997.

Finally released in 1999, *The Matrix* would earn nearly $468 million at the box office. And, despite pressures from one of the most powerful studios in the industry, the Wachowskis managed to keep the film packed with mind-bending philosophical concepts. Economic eugenics had been dealt a major blow.

But what's it about? Imagine the YouTube conspiracy nuts aren't just incapable of understanding a metaphor—the world we know and are so eager to destroy is a simulated reality controlled by AI overlords.

Look, this is a 26 year old movie. You've either seen it legally or illegally or you're a goddamn monster who doesn't like sci-fi or Keanu Reeves. So I'll spare you the plot breakdown—that's not what the movie is about anyway.

The Matrix is about choice. Go to the nightclub or stay home? Escape law enforcement by scaling a skyscraper or see what they want? Let a group of random strangers perform experimental surgery on you in the back of a moving car or walk home? Red pill or blue pill? Let Morpheus die or sacrifice yourself to save him? Run or fight? *The Matrix* reminds us that our choices shape our reality.

I woke from a strange dream a couple days after watching the movie for this review. Who knows how many times I've seen the damn thing. Hell, my earliest memory of it is my friend acting out the rooftop shootout between Neo and one of the agents in gym class, complete with Trinity's "Dodge this" line. The problem with that memory is that I haven't had a goddamn gym class since before the fucking movie came out. Which makes the dream all the weirder.

In it, I was trying to save some unknown companion from some unseen force. We were being hunted down and I was trying to get them to understand we'd been there before. Lived these same lives. Had these same experiences. Made these same choices. Over and over, like Bill Murray in that endless Groundhog Day hell. Our only hope of escape was to make different choices—to understand our decisions created the world we live in.

Then a woman appeared in the sky. Her body contorted into a star shape through a combination of yoga and Shibari rope bondage. This part could, undoubtedly, be linked to my online search history. I woke up thinking, *What the fuck did I just experience?*

What indeed?

How many times have I seen this movie? How many times have I written this review? How many times have you read it, wondering if I'm in my right mind? Is this the first time, or do you feel an uneasy itch of déjà-vu in the back of your mind like I do?

The thing is—we can't actually know. None of us remembers anything from before we were born. And, for all it can tell us about the universe, science knows fuck-all about what happened before the universe began. Common consensus is that nothing happened. But the truth is that we can't know—we just accept whatever makes us feel comfortable, if we even think about it at all.

A question is echoed throughout the film. *What is the Matrix?* You may not have an answer the first time you watch it. Or the second. But by your tenth watch you will almost certainly have an answer. An answer that will likely evolve or change after your eleventh watch.

In truth, the answer isn't important. It's not a new question. Just a rewording of the age old: *What is the nature of reality?* What's important is that you start asking the question and go rooting for an answer.

Jesus, it's no wonder *The Matrix* has inspired paranoid conspiracy theories about simulated realities and AI. A whole cadre of content creators and marketers who scavenge their living off of those who believe the conspiracies. That the *Matrix* legal defense exists—in which a defendant claims they committed their crimes believing they were trapped in a simulated reality. *The Matrix* isn't a movie—it's a philosophical pipe bomb packed with shards of existential skepticism.

And I can't think of a more important thing that came out of Hollywood in the 26 years since its release. Because, when the credits roll, you will have seen *The Matrix.* But when you finally start wrestling with the 2 hours and 16 minutes of questions, themes, and concepts the Wachowskis hurled into the masses—then you will have *really* seen *The Matrix.*

There are tons of people who shouldn't go near this movie. If you buy into QAnon theories or think Elon Musk knows a goddamn thing, stay away. *The Matrix* will only go off in your head and make a disaster out of a mess. But, for the relatively

stable and harmless—among whom I am debatably a member—*The Matrix* is capable of becoming the revolutionary explosion needed to *free your mind.*

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a date with the woman in the red dress.

-RV

<Fiction>

Like the Devil He Is

<by **Ronin Vektor**>

Look at that motherfucker. Just the sight of him sends hellfire scorching through my veins.

I want to wrap my hands around his neck and choke the life out of him. Squeeze until his eyes roll back, his face turns purple, and he pisses himself—the last of his pathetic life soaking his pants, pooling at his feet. God, it would be better than an after-sex cigarette.

It's not possible. But Jesus, I wish it were.

I swing the hammer right through his face. Glass shatters with a musical shriek. The mirror falls, scattering fragments across the floor, scattering broken pieces of him.

It's not as good as strangling the bastard—but it helps.

So I carry the hammer to the next mirror. And the next.

Smash his mocking face again and again. Catch the sneaky son of a bitch in a couple windows too. The hammer takes care of that.

Wild laughter bursts out of me—raw, ugly, giddy.

Don't look at me like that.

Like I've lost my mind.

Poe said it best:

I had been insane—no fucking doubt about that.

Can't you see him?

Not me. The other one. The one hiding in the reflection.

Look closer.

I was just a boy when the devil came to me. Promises slithering from his grinning mouth. Whispers of what the future could be—if I just let him in.

And I did. Like a dumbass kid accepting candy from a stranger, I let him in.

I listened for years.

Decades.

Believed he'd deliver: money, fame, fucking happiness.

Yeah, I'd been insane.

But now-now I was experiencing a horrible goddamn interval of sanity.

I bet there's one in you too. Whispering sweet promises. Telling you tomorrow's the day all your dreams come true.

Go ahead. Look close before I smash this mirror too. Hell, you might smash it yourself when you see the demon hiding in *your* reflection.

Some people go their whole lives and never realize it's lying to them. But those of us who've crawled through a shit show know better.

And we burn with a hate greater than any other.

But what can you do though? They don't have bodies you can tear apart.

Or do they?

See, every time I looked in the mirror, I only saw myself. Middle-aged. Poor. Unaccomplished. A miserable fucking nobody.

But I *felt* him looking back. That false-tongued seducer.

That look on your face tells me you know what I'm talking about. Maybe you stare too long at your reflection sometimes, and feel that icy finger slide up your spine.

That's what I started feeling all the goddamn time. Until I knew he was there.

Today, I decided to find him.

I stood at the mirror and stared. Minutes dragged into hours. I inched closer, little by little. Didn't want the little bastard noticing.

My breath fogged the glass as I studied every detail of my reflection.

Until I found him.

You'll find yours too.

Look deep into the reflection of your eyes.

See it?

Yeah. That's it.

The reflection of your reflection. Gazing back at you.

I know.

You want to look away. Like it doesn't want you seeing it.

But I couldn't stop.

Every muscle, every thought, every heartbeat throbbed with the need to crush the fucking lies out of him.

And then—I had a hammer in my hand.

Oh, you poor crazy bastard.

No.

Shut up.

Shut the fuck up.

I spin around. Bare feet crunch over shattered glass. Pain blossoms,

but I barely feel it—just the raw cut of blood trailing behind me.

You think I'm the liar? I came to you like I come to everyone—the ghost of what could be.

I don't want to hear this.

Shut the fuck up.

You were a boy then. So full of promise. I just turned your gifts into dreams.

I swing the hammer, wild and frantic. Arcs of air and fury. Screaming. Trying to drown him out.

SHUTUPSHUTUPSHUTUP!

And what did you do to chase them? Nothing.

My screams collapse to sobs. Tears blur the broken world around me.

I just want it to stop.

Desperate, I slam the hammer into the last mirror. Glass rains down. Silence follows.

The silence is Heaven. I gasp for it like a drowning man.

The hammer sags from my hand.

You can't get rid of me. I'm part of you.

Rage.

Rage so pure it burns white floods my chest. I swing the hammer in blind fury.

A tremor jolts up my arm as it connects. A wet crack shudders through the air.

What the fuck did I hit?

Hey.

I asked what-

No.

No, no, no.

I'm sorry.

You're at my feet. Blood and brain matter leaking out, glass glittering in the mess.

I didn't mean to.

It was an accident. I-

Before the thought finishes, I fall to my hands and knees. Vomiting until my guts feel hollow, painting you in bile and blood.

Goddamn it! What the fuck did you do?!

Fragments of mirror burrow into my flesh. Hands, knees, face—bleeding from a thousand tiny cuts. Wailing into the collapse of everything I ever was.

But I can't bring myself to move.

Goddamn that devil.

This is his fucking fault.

My fault? You piece of shit! I've done nothing but give you something to hope for. You're the one who gave up.

I did give up.

But he doesn't understand.

He doesn't get what it's like to be born already buried. To claw for air your whole life, knowing the world stacked the dirt against you.

He doesn't get that his promises are poison.

If I'd known that back then, I would have told him to go straight to hell. Like the devil he is.

You think I'm the demon? I could have been somebody. Could have been happy.

The broken mirror reflects my face a hundred times. I can feel him staring out. Accusing.

Did you know that's what Satan really means? Accuser.

Shit. Forgot you're not in a condition to answer.

I pick up a sliver of mirror. He's still in there.

And God help me—I laugh. Because he still thinks he's the victim.

I am the fucking victim! You think I'm a burden? I'm trapped inside you!

Yeah?

We can fix that.

I look deep into the reflection. See him looking back.

I know how to fix that.

I aim the shard at my eyes-

And start cutting.

README

The Cyberpunk Book Club #001

May 2025

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What the Fuck Did I Just Read?

The Cyberpunk Book Club (TCBC) is a 'zine and podcast for those ready to face the reality of living in a high-tech, low-life dystopia. Inside you'll find essays, reviews, rants, philosophy, fiction, and other bits of digital anarchy.

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Contribute to TCBC

Submissions to **The Cyberpunk Book Club** are currently by invite only. If

this changes in the future, this is where you'll hear about it.

Contributors

<Ronin Vektor> is a nobody from nowhere. But, chances are, so are you. He spends his time working, pretending to be a serious writer, and gooning to AI generated porn.

Images for *The High-Tech Low-Life Bukkake* and *The Matrix: A Philosophical Pipe Bomb* were created using Dessi. Yes, I know that's a fucking AI porn image generator. Image for *Welcome to TCBC* and *Like the Devil He Is* were created using OpenAI's DALL·E image generator.